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additional observations on the generation of the Opossum, which were read and referred to the Committee on the previous paper, viz. : Drs. Morton, Leidy, and Hallowell.

Dr. Morton also read a letter from Dr. Middleton Michel, of Charleston, S. C., addressed to the Rev. Dr. Bachman, containing some highly interesting "Facts concerning the habits and generation of the Opossum." Referred to the above Committee.

Mr. Henry C. Lea communicated, for publication in the Journal, a paper entitled "Catalogues of the Tertiary Testacea of the United States; by Henry C. Lea." Referred to a Committee, consisting of Dr. Morton, Mr. Phillips, and Mr. Conrad.

Dr. Leidy read a paper describing a new fossil genus of Ruminantoid Pachyderms, (*Merycoidodon Culbertsonii*;) which was referred to Drs. Wilson, Morton, and Pickering.

On motion, *Resolved*, That a copy of the Proceedings, as far as published, be presented to the Rev. Dr. T. S. Savage.

On motion, also *Resolved*, That a copy of the first number of the New Series of the Journal be presented to M. Fischer de Waldheim.

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April 11th, 1848.

Vice President MORTON in the Chair.

Letters were read—

From Prideaux John Selby, Esq., dated Twizell House, Northumberland, England, March 14th, 1848, returning acknowledgments for his election as a correspondent:—

From Richard Brown, Esq., dated Sydney Mines, Cape Breton, N. S., March 1st, 1848, offering for the acceptance of the Academy, a number of interesting coal fossils from that region:—

From Mr. Joseph Smith, of Amherst, N. S., dated March 29th, 1848, in relation to the "Joggins main seam of Coal" in that vicinity:—

From the Secretary of the American Philosophical Society, dated April 9th, 1848, acknowledging the receipt of the last number of the Proceedings.

A letter was read from the Rev. Dr. T. S. Savage, addressed to Dr. Hallowell, dated Natchez, Miss., Jan. 10th, 1848, containing the following interesting information, in relation to the habits of some specimens of Natural History from Africa, recently presented by the writer to the Society.

"It was my intention to have made an earlier communication on the habits of several of the specimens of Natural History, which I sent to the cabinet of the Academy of Natural Sciences, from Liberia, but having been much occupied in matters of higher moment, I have not found the time to do it, and, even now, I must defer my observations on the ants, &c.

At the present time, I propose to give a few facts respecting but one specimen of the *Saurians*, (of which I send several, some of which I think will prove to be new) and two *Ophidians*.

1. *Crocodylida*. At this distance of time, I cannot say whether I found this

to be an alligator or *gavial*, but, my impression is, that it was the latter. The question, however, you will be able to decide. It was captured at Cavalla, a mission station of the Protestant Episcopal Church, and a coast town belonging to the tribe of Africans called Grebos, the aboriginal inhabitants of the region of Cape Palmas. Its local native name is the same as that given to the dog, which, adopting as we do, the principles of Pickering for the reduction to writing of the Indian languages, is written *Kbink*, not easily expressed in English.

Its habits are the same, in general, as those of the crocodile proper and alligator. It inhabits the smaller fresh water streams and standing water in the low grounds, feeding on fish and aquatic reptiles. It digs a hole in the bed or banks of streams for a temporary abode, whence it springs upon its unwary prey. It deposits its eggs on the surface of the ground, and covers them over with leaves and light trash, in which particular, it differs from the crocodile proper, and alligator. It is timid and harmless, frequently taken by the natives and esteemed highly for food. This individual would not have escaped the caldron, had it not been for a fortunate junction of circumstances with their superstitions.

### 3. *Ophidians*. *Amphisbœna*.

I send a sketch taken soon after its capture, which accurately shows its colors in a recent state. It was captured by one of my Missionary associates on the beach.

It is stated in works on Natural History, that its food is principally ants. I am inclined to think this correct, as it is the opinion of intelligent natives in Africa, from the fact, that this animal inhabits the domicils of the "white ant" (*Termes bellicosus* of Smeathman, *T. fatale* of Linn.), and hence has received the name of *Nyonh-re-tedi*, literally the white ant snake.

It is not often visible, and its dubious character renders it an object of great dread to the natives, it being considered dangerous to look upon it. It is considered an extraordinary *Fetish*, i. e., something that has the power in itself of exerting a direct influence upon other bodies, for good or evil. Of this reptile an evil influence is always predicted.

Viper. (*Cerastes nasicornis*, Hal., Proceed. A. N. S. Vol. III. p. 319.)

The natives dread this serpent more than any other known.

It is very venomous—slow and sluggish in its movements—retreats from man, except when trodden on, or opposed in its progress.

It inhabits both high and low grounds, feeding on rats, the smaller reptiles, and fresh water fish that inhabit the marshes.

Its vicinity is known by a peculiar sound, somewhat like a suppressed groan; this is succeeded by a hissing or blowing noise. The former is a warning that every one acquainted with its habits remembers and knows well the necessity of heeding; the latter indicates a readiness to bite. When it is about to make an attack, it flattens its head and body, retracting itself upon its tail, and then, with its mouth enormously distended, its fangs protruded, and eyes flashing fire, it darts at its prey. It is said not to spring, but, with the latter part of its body and tail fixed to the ground, to strike at its victim.

The poison is very intense: generally it proves immediately fatal, but sometimes hours will intervene. It is probably modified in its action, in such cases, by the difference of susceptibility in persons, superficial character of the wound, and perhaps other incidental circumstances.

The native treatment for the bite of this, and all other serpents, is, to *suck out the poison*: make a free incision over the wound, and apply the juice of an unknown plant, sometimes a strong decoction of the same. Recovery is sometimes said to occur, but very rarely, however. A direct, deep flesh wound is supposed always to prove fatal.

The symptoms are, severe pain in the parts—rigors more or less palpable—sensation of heat—vomiting—profuse perspiration and purging. If not much reduction of vital energy attend, there is a possibility of recovery; but if, on the contrary, an early sickness comes on, there can be no hope—death soon follows.

A case occurred at one of our mission stations, supposed to be from the bite of this viper, though it is not certain. A young man had been out in search of Palm-nuts (fruit of the *Elais guiniensis*.) As he was returning, he heard the *warning sound*, but knowing the habits of the reptile, and supposing it to be on one side, he proceeded without precaution, and was bitten in the calf of his leg. He represented himself as being immediately disabled. He halloed till some one came to his relief, and was carried on the mission premises, which were at hand. It is supposed that a half hour, perhaps an hour, had passed. The leg, when first seen, was greatly swollen, nearly to the size of his thigh; the skin was tense and hot, with great pain in the surrounding parts. A free incision was made, and the blood pressed out. Stimulants and narcotics were freely given, and recovery succeeded.

The intensity of the poison has been manifested several times in the case of dogs. One case of this kind came under my immediate notice. Some of the mission scholars had permission to spend an afternoon in hunting. They procured for this purpose a valuable dog from a neighboring colonist. They had not left the road for the thicket long, before they heard a piercing cry of distress from the dog. They ran immediately to the spot, where they saw this viper, and the dog lying on his back, as if in convulsions. They shot the serpent, and carried them both to the road, by which time the dog was dead. From a minute examination into the circumstances of the case, I was convinced that not more than fifteen minutes could have transpired from the bite, to the death of the dog.

The original of the sketch I send you have in the cabinet. It was captured on the high grounds of my own premises. In company with one of my associates, I was drawn to the spot by the barking of our dogs. We found them surrounding the viper, and not twice its length from it. It was retracted upon itself, as already described, its body and tail flattened, and the latter acting as a fulcrum; from this, as a fixed point, it was darting forward alternately at the dogs. At every stroke, its jaws were widely extended, its fangs protruded to a fearful length, and its eyes rolled and flashed terribly to the beholder. My companion, being a good marksman, succeeded in bringing down the serpent without injury to the dogs. It measured as follows:—Length 3.9–12 feet; greatest circumference of the abdomen 9.1–12 inches; width of the head at base 3 inches; length of head 2.5–8 inches; length of the horny processes over the nose 7–16 of an inch. Its abdomen was considerably distended, on opening which, three rats, and other food undigested, were discovered.

It may not be irrelevant here to remark, that several cases of bites and stings of venomous reptiles and insects, have come under my notice at Cape Palmas,

which I have treated on the principles above stated. I have heard of deaths from these causes, but none have fallen within my observation. One case, that of a colonist, nearly proved fatal, but I supposed it was from the time the poison had to act in the system before he came under treatment. He was a sawyer, and was in the act of preparing a log for the saw, when he was bitten by a snake which he observed retreating. Being intent upon his work at the time, he did not get a good view of it, but said it presented a green aspect, probably another species. He had but one companion, who carried him on his back for two or three hours, when he reached my premises. The wound was in the foot; this was greatly swollen, as was also the leg as high as the knees. He seemed to be greatly prostrated and in great pain; vomited several times a light-colored watery fluid. I immediately administered, in large doses, strong rum and sulphate of morphine, and made a free incision over the wound. So reduced was the vitality of the parts that scarcely any blood flowed at first, but a passive hemorrhage came on subsequently, to stop which the blood vessels had to be taken up and tied. The whole limb up to the groin, became enormously swollen; a bad sore followed from the incision, and the cuticle of the leg, to a great extent, came off. He recovered at the end of three weeks.

This statement is made in works on Natural History, and by travellers, that the centipedes and scorpions of tropical climates are deadly poison. But in respect to those of West Africa, it is incorrect. Many stings from both have come within my notice, and have proved no more than the stings of bees and wasps."

Dr. Morton offered the following remarks on the ancient Peruvian crania from Pisco, deposited by him this evening.

He pointed out the fact that all the crania in his collection from this locality, upwards of seventy in number, have been modified by pressure into artificial forms, in one of which the head is extended or elongated in the upward direction, though in very different degrees, while in another class, the pressure has been so applied, as to flatten the forehead, and to widen and elongate the whole structure, in the manner yet practised by the Indian tribes of Oregon. Dr. Morton read translations from the works of several of the earliest travellers and historians of Peru,—Cieza, Torquanda and Garciloso de la Vega, containing descriptions of these very forms of the head, and the artificial processes that were then in use to produce them.

Dr. M. concluded by remarking, that if no other evidence had descended to us than the statements of these authors, the facts would never have been believed; but we have now abundant proof of their correctness, in the multitudes of desiccated bodies that yet remain in the Peruvian cemeteries, and which, in that dry climate, have resisted the ravages of time and temperature for hundreds, and perhaps for thousands of years.

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*April 18th, 1848.*

Vice President MORTON in the Chair.

A letter was read from William C. Redfield, Esq., dated New York, April 17, 1848, expressing his thanks and those of Professor Agassiz,